

In the Claims:

Please amend claim 1 as indicated below:

1. (currently amended) In a topper/shredder mechanism for a cane harvester including a rotatable topper/shredder element mounted for rotation about an upright axis, and a cane top gathering arrangement for directing cane tops to said shredder element, the improvement comprising: said topper/shredder element including a center support disposed along said axis; at least two topper/shredder disks spaced from each other along said axis and joined to said center support; each shredder disk having a plurality of cutting blades joined to, and projecting outwardly from, spaced locations about its periphery; and at least one air-assist vane extending between said at least two shredder disks for generating a stream of air for aiding sideways discharge of shredded cane tops from said topper/shredder element shredder.

2. (original) The topper/shredder mechanism, as defined in claim 1, wherein said topper/shredder element includes an upper, a lower and at least one intermediate shredder disk; and said at least one air-assist vane including first and second sections respectively extending between said upper and at least one intermediate disks, and between said lower and at least one intermediate disks.

3. (original) The topper/shredder mechanism, as defined in claim 1, wherein said topper/shredder element includes at least three air-assist vanes spaced equally from each other about said axis.

4. (original) The topper/shredder mechanism, as defined in claim 1, wherein said cane top gathering arrangement includes right- and left-hand cane top gathering rotors respectively mounted for counter-rotating about respective second and third upright axes located ahead of and at opposite sides of said first mentioned upright axis; and each cane top rotor including a plurality of fan blades for generating a stream of air for aiding in the sideways discharge of cane top pieces.

5. (original) The topper/shredder mechanism, as defined in claim 4, wherein each of said cane top gathering rotors includes a plurality of vertically spaced disks; and said disks each containing holes for permitting air to be drawn through them due to the action of said fan blades.

6. (original) A method of topping cane prior to topped cane stalks passing through a harvesting throat of a cane harvester, comprising the steps of:

- a. cutting and shredding cane tops as said harvester proceeds along a

row of standing cane so as to produce cane top pieces; and

b. creating a stream of air for entraining said cane top pieces and delivering them outside said harvesting throat of said harvester.